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Raising Cane, Raising Men:

An Exploration of Southern Manhood and Masculinities on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 1795-1865

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Raising Cane, Raising Men: An Exploration of Southern Manhood and Masculinities on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 1795-1865

by

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

Dedication

For my family, friends, students and teachers (past and present). Each of you has enriched my life beyond measure. I remain grateful for all of your good deeds, kind words, and sage advice. May our paths continue to cross. I would also like to dedicate this work to my own Louisiana Lady, my grandmother—the feisty lady from Rapides Parish! And my beloved sister, Angela, deserves special recognition for all of her support these past two years. Your love (and bad hairstyles!) sustained me and kept me laughing at the right times. Lastly, my mom has been a remarkable parent. She's given me the space, the freedom to grow and become the man that I am today.

Acknowledgements

My journey to become a professional historian began in sixth grade as a student at Edward L. Blackshear Elementary. There, my teacher, Ms. Edna P. Davis, instilled in me a love of civics and an ever-inquisitive mind about the past. For those things, I remain eternally grateful. I know she would be proud. Along my journey to graduate school and up to the very last minute of editing and re-writing this essay, I have been supported by a host of phenomenal people. My advisor, Dr. Daina Ramey Berry has consistently been a champion of my work and allows me to explore an ever-changing list of potential dissertation topics. She gives me the stage to whine and perform when I need to, but she always gently guides me back to reality. Thanks. Professor Thompson has pushed me to think outside of the sometimes-stifling disciplinary walls of history and to engage and even imagine a range of new source possibilities and ways of interpreting the past. Professors Stephen Marshall and Tiffany Gill have provided great scholarly and professional examples along the way. Dr. Marshall, alone, has forced me to think about the utility and relevance of my future scholarship. I would also like to thank Professor Juliet E.K. Walker for always being available to listen to my zany ideas and provide me with constant encouragement and professional wisdom. I know she has my back! Likewise, Professor Leonard Moore has been a sagacious mentor from afar. He's given me some of the best, most practical advice for navigating the thorny roads of academia. And Dr. Jacqueline Jones never ceases to remind me not to take this journey too seriously. Breathe, chuckle less, and enjoy the experience, she insists. I would be remiss in not thanking Professor Jim Sidbury. He deserves high

praise for ultimately getting me to UT. He's a real class act. He, along with my amazing history professors at Cornell, has my utmost respect and admiration.

I would also like to thank the Mocha Anthro Crew (Nedra K. Lee, Chelsi West, and Janie Scott) for tolerating my anti-theoretical rants and for sharing their prized workspace. Nedra, especially, has been my saving grace and uber-reliable sounding board for all of my grad school and personal problems. What a wonderful friend! Daryl Harris, my Bennu/PCL buddy, has also made these past two years in Austin bearable. And Luritta Dubois, my lunch pal and pop culture guru, thanks for making me laugh and think…all the time. I only hope that we remain forever connected as we move through life's unpredictability. And to the many colleagues, History Department staff members, and Briscoe staff, I can never repay my debt. Lastly, my labors in graduate school are ultimately to set an example for my two awesome nephews, Jamarcus and Jeremiah. I hope they realize that learning has many rewards.

Abstract

Raising Cane, Raising Men: An Exploration of Southern Manhood and Masculinities on Louisiana's Sugar Plantations, 1795-1865

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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This paper examines masculine gender relations on Louisiana sugar plantations from 1795 to the end of the Civil War. It argues that the distinct, homosocial space of the sugar plantation provided a diverse cast of men numerous opportunities to conform, contest, or flout altogether elements of hegemonic masculinity in the antebellum South. By illuminating the various ways in which black men and poor white men in particular negotiated the terms of the southern manhood, this study also argues for a richer, more inclusive gender conversation within southern history—one that finally takes seriously the gendered histories of *all* male subjects.

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L'introduction

In a sweeping examination of American manhood, sociologist Michael Kimmel declares, "The history of American manhood is many histories at once."[1] Bearing this claim in mind, it becomes plausible then that the history of southern manhood in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also consisted of several complicated narratives, all of which were influenced in some way by intersecting notions of race, class, religion, sexuality, locality and a host of additional factors. The planter masculine ideal—one largely predicated on the concepts of honor and mastery—however, has long served as the hegemonic version of southern masculinity while the notion of the bourgeois, self-made man occupied the same dominant position in the North.[2] Though in the southern context, this narrow conceptualization of manhood has woefully neglected the diversity of men and masculinities that have also simultaneously thrived in the antebellum South. In Louisiana, especially, several of these varied accounts of southern manhood converged in one particular space—the sugar plantation. And since men largely define themselves in relation to *each other*, then such sites where men

[1] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America : A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 8.

[2] See Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*; Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); E. Anthony. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993).

predominate arguably provide ideal environments in which to explore masculine gender relations.[3]

As a largely homosocial, male-dominated work and living space, the Louisiana sugar plantation was one of the few places in the American South where a diverse male majority (black, white, Chinese and Irish) consistently crossed paths and were consequently forced to contend with their own internal understandings and external projections of manhood.[4] Hence, it was in this distinctive world of sugarcane farming that men in Louisiana daily (re)constructed and expressed the numerous configurations and possibilities of southern masculinity. So, rather than examine notions of manhood among separate races and classes of men, or rather than attempt to execute a macro-history of masculine gender relations for the entire southern region—as numerous scholars have done—this paper, instead, uncovers the varied iterations of southern manliness found primarily on the Louisiana sugar plantation. It also examines how the mostly male sugar workforce negotiated that bricolage of masculine identities. Ultimately, attending to life on

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[3] In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel argues: "In large part, it's other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not so much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is a largely homosocial enactment," 7.

[4] This paper will focus mainly on black and white manhood narratives in sugar country. For a discussion of Chinese cane laborers, and to a lesser extent, German and Irish workers in Louisiana sugar parishes, see Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane : Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters : Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 85–86, 91.

Louisiana sugar plantations reveals that southern manhood was not solely comprised of the planter ideal. In fact, southern manhood was fluid, multivalent, and indeed, omnipresent. And at times and with great consequence, it was also contested, transformed, and even reappropriated by men—both black and white—who usually did not fall within the purview of hegemonic and patriarchal masculine norms in the region[5]. This is their story.

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5 By "hegemonic masculinity" I mean the term first introduced by sociologist R. W. Connell in the 1980s. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity within the gender hierarchy. Although hegemonic masculinity subordinates other masculinities and femininities, they can challenge it, as it was oftentimes in the South. In most Western societies today, hegemonic masculinity is associated with whiteness, heterosexuality, marriage, authority and physical toughness among other variables. In the context of the antebellum South, hegemonic masculinity describes the form of masculinity attained by white planters and other male elites. Thus, hegemonic masculinity was most easily attained by those of a particular race and class. The notion of patriarchal masculinity, however, was *somewhat* more accessible to those men, who by virtue of their maleness alone, gained their male identity and power from their domination of women. This brand of southern masculinity, patriarchal masculinity, therefore, transcended race and class to some degree. For a more recent discussion of these concepts, see R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): 829–859.

Making the Case for Men

Men and their masculine thoughts and practices are the focus of this study. Though women are not occluded altogether, they do not play a central role in this analysis of southern manhood. Michael Kimmel maintains that, "Women are not incidental to masculinity, but they are not always its central feature, either." In fact, "it is not women as corporeal beings but the 'idea' of women, or femininity—and most especially a perception of effeminacy by other men—that animates men's actions." Therefore, the idea of femininity, which is distinct from the actual physical embodiment of woman, can also serve as a "negative pole against which men define themselves." And once more, though women are not at the center of this particular discussion, usually, women and the idea of woman, even in male dominated spaces like the sugar plantation, "serve as a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking with other men."[6] At bottom, men seek other men's approval, as "masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment."[7] Essentially, this "enactment" is nothing more than the male *performance* of culturally ascribed roles and behaviors deemed appropriate for and largely by his own sex. These roles and behaviors, however, remain contingent upon articulated or assumed social expectations, and of course, time and place matter as well.

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[6] Kimmel, *Manhood in America : A Cultural History*, 7.

[7] Ibid., 3.

That men have rarely been subjected to the same type and scope of gendered analyses as female subjects makes the masculine thrust of this study all the more valuable and necessary. By the end of the modern Civil Rights Movement, many historians championed for more diversity within the profession and challenged the longstanding and seemingly problematic approaches to doing history, which included the outright disregard or ignorance of certain historical subjects. By the 1970s, women's and feminist historians insisted that women not only be written more prominently into the national narrative but also that questions of gendered power gain serious scholarly attention. For Joan Scott, a leader in this historical turn, gender remains a "primary way of signifying power relations." As a "social creation of ideas" that describes the appropriate roles for men and women, gender had to be viewed by historians as another important and unavoidable category of analysis, right alongside race, class, and an ever-growing list.[8] Echoing Scott's definition, noted gender scholar Judith Butler maintains, "gender is a construction" and that "without those acts, there would be no gender at all."[9]

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[8] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1054-56.

[9] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre.* Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

However, the influx of gendered histories that emerged from the late 1970s onward oftentimes disregarded the fact that men are not only sexed but gendered as well. Scott contends that part of the historians' benign neglect of men as gendered subjects stems, in part, from larger societal claims that the term "gender" is nothing more than a proxy for "women."[10] Writing some twenty years after Scott and in a noticeably more critical tone on the lack of progress in this area, early American historian Toby Ditz asserts that women's historians, in a rush to insert women into the conventional narrative, spurred on a "second scandal" in which they "suppressed the gender of their male subjects." In Ditz's estimation, "Masculine particularity, like whiteness, had been overlooked precisely to the extent that the power and privilege it signified was hegemonic."[11] Thus, if the aforementioned historical negligence plagued the so-called larger master narrative, then one can only surmise how this damning oversight has affected the (re)telling and interpretations of America's regional and even ethnic histories. Ultimately, not only have *some* gender historians confined to the archives, altogether dismissed, or totally occluded the rich life stories and testimonies of non-elite men, they have also failed to simply interrogate fully men's gendered identities and to explore how gender shaped men's interior and exterior lives. Only by

[10] Ibid., 1054.

[11] Toby L. Ditz. "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History." *Gender & History*. 16, no 1 (2004): 1-35.

uncovering and analyzing men's stories, then, does a fuller picture of American and indeed southern history emerges. In fact, Stephen Berry argues that historians have for years talked obliquely about masculine gender relations in their attempts to understand elements of southern courtship, leisure, education and politics, but no one has yet set forth an agenda for the field of southern masculinities studies. Likewise, by spotlighting masculinities, both the planter ideal and the less dominant manifestations of southern manhood on Louisiana's sugar plantations, do we gain more insight about southern gender relations heretofore largely untold.[12]

To achieve this fuller recovery of southern masculinities, men's gender must be made visible first. Thus, this study seeks to center men and also write the wide range of southern masculinities into the larger gender conversation across various disciplines. British historian John Tosh ironically proclaims, "A profound dualism in Western thought has served to keep the spotlight away from men. In the

[12] I use the plural form of masculinity to make the point that it is problematic to assume that one monochromatic, singular definition of the term covers such a broad spectrum of men. I believe each man experienced manhood and the public performance that is masculinity in a way particular unto himself. For more discussion of the alternative definitions of masculinity see Edward R. Baptist, "The Absent Subject: African American Masculinity and Forced Migration to the Antebellum Plantation Frontier," in Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 136-73; Thomas Foster, *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins. *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

historical record it is as though masculinity is everywhere but nowhere."[13] In the context of Louisiana sugar plantations, however, masculinities were unmistakingly everywhere, so by attending to these diverse and intersecting masculine narratives and situating them under the broad rubric of southern manhood, this work then fills a lacuna in southern history and other sub-fields such as slavery, labor, and even in the burgeoning field of men's studies.[14]

[13] John Tosh, "What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop*, no. 38 (1994): 180.

[14] The hope is that by foregrounding male gender relations, particularly among non-elite men across the color line, we will learn more about how masculine identities are created and contested in a southern context. Decentering the planter ideal is but the first step in truly understanding the many nuances of southern manhood.

Why Dixie?

Early studies of manhood and masculinities focused almost exclusively on northern white elites and rarely looked southward for inspiration.[15] Outside of its predominately rural economy, rigid class and racial hierarchies, the South has also had to contend with its own problematic gender conventions. Thus, "… to explore masculinity in the context of the American South owes much to the region's distinctiveness," especially since "gender ideals, such as notions of masculinity, have taken their own *distinct* form in the South." These particular gender conventions were "forged out of varied relationships over the years between black and white, master and slave, and landowner and sharecropper," alongside a host of other similarly dynamic social relationships.[16] Though, for many historians, explorations of southern manhood often involve close interrogations of large theoretical concepts such as honor, violence, patriarchy, paternalism and mastery. For this study, notions of southern honor and mastery indeed prove crucial to understanding male gender dynamics in Louisiana's sugar country, and across the color line, but they only illuminate a small part of the story.

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[15] See for example, Carnes and Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*; Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*.

[16] Lydia Plath and Sergio Lussana, *Black and White Masculinity in the American South, 1800-2000* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2009), 2.

The essence of southern manhood has been tough to ultimately pin down. Historians have used various frameworks to shape the discussion of the subject. Hoping to explain the South's long history of militancy and its ultimate turn to a violent civil war, John Hope Franklin in 1956 and later, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, popularized the belief that a chivalric code of conduct, in which honor was a part, ordered the southerner's life. In viewing the southerner primarily as male, Franklin notes, "Other attributes and trappings of the chivalric cult ranged from flamboyant oratory to lavish hospitality. But through them all, and affecting them all, ran a concept of honor that was of tremendous importance in regulating and determining the conduct of the individual."[17] Franklin's attempt to explain a key part of southern culture came at a poignant moment in the region's and indeed the nation's history. At the time of Franklin's writing, African Americans in the South experienced countless, daily acts of racial and state violence. In fact, a group of self-proclaimed white southern men brutally murdered fourteen year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi the year before Franklin's work emerged. Ironically, these men defended their actions by invoking their southern manhood duty to preserve the honor of white women, as Till was accused of making a suggestive remark to a white female shopper in a small general store.

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[17] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861.* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 34.

Nearly thirty years after the publication of Franklin's *The Militant South*, historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown also framed the discussion of southern manhood around the similar themes of honor and violence. While focusing almost exclusively on white male elites, Wyatt-Brown viewed the medieval notion of honor as the driving force of southern masculine identity. Although years earlier, John Hope Franklin succinctly described southern honor. He argued:

> While the concept of honor was an intangible thing, it was no less real to the Southerner than the most mundane commodity he possessed. It was something inviolable and precious to the ego, to be protected at every cost…The honor of the Southerner caused him to defend with his life the slightest suggestion of irregularity in his honesty or integrity; and he was fiercely sensitive to any imputation that might cast a shadow on the character of the women of his family. To him nothing was more important than honor. Indeed, he placed it above wealth, art, learning, and the other 'delicacies' of an urban civilization and regarded its protection as a continuing preoccupation.[18]

In *Southern Honor,* Wyatt-Brown's characterization deviated little if at all from Franklin's. Though separated by decades, both scholars interrogated mostly planter records and the papers of white elites to conclude that honor was a constituent part of southern manhood and a key feature in the whole of southern culture.[19]

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[18] Ibid., 34–35.

[19] Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that the antebellum North and South possessed two different types of honor. For the North, it was an "embourgeoisement" of honor but "traditional honor" in the South. He also notes that a man's honor relied upon public evaluation. He contends that for southerners, the greatest fear one had was to be publicly shamed or dishonored. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor : Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 185.

Together, both historians chronicled southern men from great wealth and notable parentage. Thus, these men's noble backgrounds and lingering attachment to antiquated European ideas "allowed them to perpetuate a code of honor increasingly outdated in early national America, clashing with rationalism, restraint, and respectability sought by northern middle-class men." Like the South Carolinian author W.J. Cash and other southern spokesmen before him, Wyatt-Brown "found that emotion rather than intellect drove southern masculinity." And the men that he analyzed in his work demonstrated this because they "immortalized valor through vengeance, exalted individual will, and defended masculinity through duels, vigilantism, and lynching." [20]

Nonetheless, Franklin contends, "no single class had a monopoly on these sentiments and attitudes." He maintains that "the planters refined the notion of honor" and other groups often "assimilated the interests and points of view of the dominant element of the community."[21] Thus, honor was a concept defined and readily available first to white male elites in the South, but other white men were able to buy into its social value as well. Ariela Gross likewise argues, "White

[20] Craig Thompson. Friend and Lorri Glover, *Southern Manhood : Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), viii.

[21] Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861.*, 36.

identity and manhood were both defined and affirmed through [public] rituals of honor."[22]

Throughout the South, part of the public rituals of honor oftentimes involved martial violence. Patricia Hill Collins notes the connection of violence to the establishment and entrenchment of a hegemonic white masculine identity in the South. In her estimation, those southern white men at the top of the region's social hierarchy relied on various forms of domination to secure their manly positions, but violence especially:

> Laid the foundation for forms of masculinity that installed propertied White men at the top of the social hierarchy, Black men at the bottom, and landless working class White men somewhere in between. The ability of White men to whip and kill Black men at will and force them to witness violence against their female partners and children served not just as a tool of racial control, but violence became deeply embedded in the very definition of masculinity. Because enslaved African men were denied the patriarchal power that came with family and property, they claimed other markers of masculinity, namely, sexual prowess and brute strength…Black men were permitted dimensions of masculinity that benefited Whites.[23]

Historians have been quick to note, however, that "the Southern code of honor was not the exclusive possession of gentlemen;" lower class men also engaged in their own honor rituals. And once this code of honor merged with the "unifying principle" known as "'*herrenvolk* democracy,'" then the South experienced a "democratization of honor, a recognition that there were elements of honor in

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[22] Ariela Julie Gross, *Double Character : Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49.

[23] Patricia Hill Collins quoted in Gail Garfield, *Through Our Eyes : African American Men's Experiences of Race, Gender, and Violence* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 18.

which all white men could partake…"[24] It is worth noting that southern honor, though most associated with the masculine chivalric code, was also "intimately connected to, and dependent on, both the institution of slavery…"[25] And as such, white men derived much of their honor by dishonoring blacks and other social inferiors, women included.

Paternalism, coupled with the idea of mastery, has long been used to characterize white slaveholders' power over their enslaved laborers and family. Like patriarchy, paternalism and mastery are both internalized gendered identities that "depend more on personal conduct than on public acknowledgement."[26] Thus, for Louisiana slaveholders and those elsewhere in the South, mastery over one's family and sugar plantation, which included bondpersons and itinerant white and later Chinese laborers, essentially made the achievement of manhood possible. Scholars such as Eugene Genovese and Stephanie McCurry have demonstrated that white slaveholders and yeomen farmers throughout the South constructed identities as free men through their demonstrated mastery over others, their households, and even the land. For Genovese, the master-slave relationship, for example, turned on the notion of paternalism, whereby the white master exploited and dehumanized his slave workforce all under the guise that his

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[24] Gross, *Double Character : Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom*, 49.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Friend and Glover, *Southern Manhood : Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ix.

wretched behavior merely provided what was best for the enslaved. Believing that slavery was most beneficial to the black bondman, the slaveholder consequently viewed the "peculiar institution" as the best possible social arrangement in the South.[27] Furthermore, slavery allowed white planters to assert their racial, class, and indeed masculine privilege over their own subordinate families and a legion of impotent slaves and less powerful whites.

It should be noted, however, that the scholarship on the yeomen, the plain folk of the South, has not been as expansive as that which focuses on southern men of the planter class. The profusion of extant source materials from the planter class, and more so from the one percent who made up the planter aristocracy in the antebellum South, has been allowed to shape the narrative of the pre-Civil War South. The planter and his family, therefore, has stood at the center of practically all analyses of southern social history while the yeoman majority has yet to find its way in mainstream southern historical scholarship. Moreover, much remains elusive about the white common man in the South, and only recently has a small cohort of historians tried to bring forth his story. In so doing, these studies have only begun to crack the veneer of the masculine culture and folkways among

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[27] See Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll : The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Stephanie. McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds : Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

middling and poorer white men in the South.[28] If these studies reveal anything about the nature or character of masculinity and manhood among the plain folk it would be the supremacy of elite conceptions of manliness in the South. Arguably, the planter masculine ideal has long served as the hegemonic version of southern manhood, and as such, those scholars who have focused inordinately on this particular framework, have woefully neglected the diversity of men and masculinities that also colored the southern landscape in antebellum America.

Since black men constituted the male-majority in sugar country and in various areas throughout the South, it is most appropriate to note how historians have treated what Leslie M. Harris calls "enchained masculinity."[29] Black and white southern manhood was not one in the same, and therefore should be examined both separately and jointly to locate all of the subtle and not so subtle

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[28] For a good survey of scholars examining the South's plain folk, see Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South : Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins : Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Elliott J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (1985): 18–43; J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society : White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, Conn.; Scranton, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press ; Distributed by Harper & Row, 1985); McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds : Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*; Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949); William Kauffman. Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

[29] Leslie M. Harris proposes that slavery scholars interrogate manhood under slavery, paying great attention to male sexuality and intimacy. She calls for a re-reading of well-known sources and suggests that historians begin to think more critically about the methodologies available to explore the masculine side of slavery.

nuances therein. One could argue that the historiography on black manhood began with the very proslavery proposition that slaves were first and foremost *not* men. Instead, according to this late nineteenth and early twentieth century proslavery grammars, bondmen were infantilized savages who more than anything needed the 'peculiar institution' as a way to civilization, according to historians like U.B Phillips and numerous southern slavery apologists. Over time, slavery scholars abandoned such problematic views, though only for other equally troublesome ones.

By attending to the so-called slave personality types, slaves, and especially male bondmen, were classified and grouped into seemingly arbitrary and starkly generalized categories. Historian Stanley Elkins marked bondmen as samboes or rebels, or more descriptively as Nats, Jacks, or Toms by. For years, Elkins' so-called "Sambo Thesis" was allowed to represent the spectrum of black masculine types since few scholars openly challenged his early assertions.[30] In many ways, those three personality types determined the limits and bounds of a bondman's

[30] For a discussion of slave personality types, see Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); John Hope Franklin and Loren. Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves : Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Vincent P. Franklin, "Slavery, Personality, and Black Culture--Some Theoretical Issues," *Phylon (1960-)* 35, no. 1 (March 1, 1974): 54–63; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1228–1252; Kenneth M. Stampp, "Rebels and Sambos: The Search for the Negro's Personality in Slavery," *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 3 (1971): 367–392.

willingness to act under slavery. And certainly, belonging to one group instead of another suggested the degree of one's masculinity and manhood. Nat was the vicious, hypermasculine black rebel in waiting who characterized the far extreme of black masculinity whereas the Sambo caricature represented every slaveholder's ideal male bondman. He was affable, fun-loving, a diligent worker and yet slightly aloof. In a sense, he was too naïve to fully recognize his imprisoned condition or do anything to change it.[31]

Nonetheless, by the mid-1980s and 1990s, historians still relied on simple binaries to interrogate the construction and expression of black manhood. Most discussions of the topic were framed in terms of accommodation/resistance or provider/protector and several other tired dualities. By relying on these frameworks alone to explore slave manhood, the conversation and the realm of black masculine possibilities were immediately limited.

Unfortunately, there remains a rather surface and peripheral inquiry into the distinctive histories of black men during slavery. With the advent of black women's history in the early 1980s, a flood of groundbreaking and much needed scholarship drastically offered new gendered interpretations of how black women experienced slavery, yet one unintended consequence of this new wave of gender work was the almost wholesale abandonment or marginalization of the black

[31] In *Slave Community,* John Blassingame fully dissects Elkin's "Sambo Thesis" and discredits it quite convincingly in chapter 6.

male's enslavement experiences. Since classic syntheses of American slavery—from U.B. Phillip's *American Negro Slavery* (1918) to John Blassingame's *Slave Community* (1972)— allowed male slaves to stand in overwhelmingly as proxies for *all* slaves, historians such as Deborah Gray White, Jacqueline Jones, Jennifer L. Morgan, Stephanie M.H. Camp and Daina Ramey Berry, all thought it both necessary and timely to complicate those old male narratives and put forth newer, richer, and field-defining scholarship that compelled a re-examination of American slavery and slave iconography, and all while deploying gender as a category of analysis.[32] The result was a flowering of scholarship that centered women, but unfortunately, left questions about slave manhood and masculinities grossly unanswered. Ultimately, a much longer and revised version of this study will contribute to or perhaps spark a much-needed dialogue about southern manhood and masculinities.

Therefore, examining masculine gender relations in the South is most appropriate since "interrelated masculine values [often] shaped the families, communities, economies, and political lives of the white male leadership of the Old South" and those men (and women) who did not belong to the upper echelons

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[32] See Deborah Gray White. *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South.* (New York: Norton, 1985); Jacqueline Jones. *Labor or Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present.* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Jennifer L. Morgan. *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Stephanie M.H. Camp; Daina Ramey Berry. *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category Historical Analysis." *American Historical Review.* 91 (1986), 1053-75.

of southern society. Undeniably, manhood (and womanhood) truly mattered in the South. And for those southern men who were not a part of the white gentry, such as the black male majorities on Louisiana's sugar plantations and white agricultural workers like plantation overseers, the "dominant idealized masculine traits among southern whites" were undoubtedly "co-opted, transformed, and even rejected on occasion by the diverse men who populated" the region from colonial times to the Civil War.[33] Besides, grappling with male gender identity was arguably as much of a southern preoccupation as tackling the strange life and career of the concept of 'race.' And while 'race' mattered profoundly in the antebellum South, there was also no escaping gender's importance in ordering southern society either. For masculinity, defined as "both a psychic and social identity," shaped the social terrain and even work dynamics throughout the Slave South and specifically on Louisiana's sugar plantations.[34]

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33 Friend and Glover, *Southern Manhood : Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, x.

34 John Tosh argues specifically that masculinity "is both a psychic and a social identity: psychic, because it is integral to the subjectivity of every male as this takes shape in infancy and childhood; social, because masculinity is inseparable from peer recognition, which in turn depends on performance in the social sphere." See Tosh, "What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," 198.

Why Sugar Country?

In light of the purported "distinctiveness" of the South, Louisiana and its booming sugar economy provide one germane example of regional peculiarity. Speaking of Louisiana's special place within the South, historian John C. Rodrigue argues that, "The Old South comprised of many diverse localities, each in its own way unique, but none matched southern Louisiana in its distinctiveness." Southern Louisiana, he maintains, was not singularly a slave society but a "sugar society" as well. More precisely, "Louisiana's sugar plantations were a *tertium quid*," since they relied heavily on "New World sugar production and American slavery" to thrive and as a means to maintain a distinctive regional identity.[35]

For decades though, Louisiana's twenty-plus sugar parishes were anomalies within a state and region where cotton reigned as the undisputed king. And though Louisiana's sugar plantations shared much in common with antebellum cotton plantations, "the worlds of cotton and sugar differed in as many ways before the Civil War as they would after it."[36] One glaring difference, for example, was the cotton planter's near insistence on maintaining a relatively balanced slave

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[35] John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields : From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 9.

[36] Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields : From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880*, 10.

gender ratio on his estate.[37] Conversely, sugar planters preferred male laborers to females, even though "experience swiftly demonstrated that sexist assumptions about the relative underperformance of women in the cane world were false."[38]

Shortly after Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793, many slaveholders from the Upper South migrated further west to partake in the subsequent cotton boom. Yet, there were still some who invested and placed their faith in the fecund plots of land surrounding the Louisiana's numerous bayous as an entré into the potentially lucrative business of sugar production. By 1750, however, sugar planting gained traction in the subtropic region of Louisiana, and by the 1830s, it had colored much of the state's southern landscape before cotton could take hold. And after technological innovations by Jean Etienne de Boré, known as the "Savior of Louisiana," and Norbert Rillieux, a free man of color who changed the way sugar planters fueled their sugar technologies, the Louisiana sugar economy grew exponentially. By most estimates, the sugar industry in antebellum Louisiana "accounted for 95% of the sugar produced in the South."[39] Texas, Florida and parts of Georgia also grew sugarcane commercially during the nineteenth century. Eventually the crop's predominance in Louisiana not only defined the state's

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37 Michael Tadman, "The Demographic Cost of Sugar: Debates on Slave Societies and Natural Increase in the Americas," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 1, 2000): 1543, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2652029.

38 Follett, *The Sugar Masters : Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860*, 63.

39 *Sugar at LSU: A Chronology* http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/exhibits/e-exhibits/sugar/contents.html *(accessed 3/27/12).*

economic and political outlook, sugar production also arguably gave rise to "a distinctive slaveholding elite as well as to large, complex slave communities."[40] Likewise, on these sugar estates a distinctly male-driven plantation culture emerged in which an extraordinary set of masculine relationships developed in the sugarhouses, the fields, the quarters and the Big House, as well as on adjacent roads, waterways, and other nearby public venues.

[40] Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields : from Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880*, 10.

'He Bound fer Lousy Anna'

Louisiana's vast sugar plantations were notorious in antebellum America for various reasons. Georgia plantation mistress and self-proclaimed abolitionist, Francis Kemble described life in Louisiana's sugar regions as an "infernal punishment" for the enslaved, and former Maryland slave, Frederick Douglass similarly submitted that cane country condemned bondmen to a "life of living hell."[41] Bondmen and women often feared being sold down river to Louisiana, not only because they dreaded the separation of their families but because the labor-intensive, spirit-breaking world of sugar cultivation was well-known to send the enslaved to early deaths. Jacob Stroyer, a former slave turned abolitionist, spoke for the enslaved masses when he too concurred, "Louisiana was considered a place of slaughter."[42] For the harsh climate and the militaristic sugar planting regime was no friend to the enslaved field worker or sugar maker. Perhaps more than any singular individual in antebellum America, Harriet Beecher Stowe introduced most northerners to Louisiana slavery in her best-selling 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was Stowe who arguably sealed Louisiana's unforgiving reputation as a death zone for those slaves who unfortunately found themselves living and working on

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[41] Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 122; Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1983), 173.

[42] Jacob Stroyer, *My Life in the South* (Salem: Salem Observer Book and Job Print, 1885), 42–43.

the state's ruthless sugar plantations. Over time, even foreign travellers played a part in crafting both the image and legend of Louisiana's brutality. A British traveller, Edward Abdy, recorded the lyrics to a popular slave song that highlighted the infamy of the sugar plantations in the state. The song proclaimed:

I was born in Sout' Ca'lina,
Fines' country eber seen.
I gwine from Sout' Ca'lina,
I gwine to New Orleans.

Ole boss he discontentum,
He take de mare, Black Fanny,
He buy er peddler wagon,
He bound fer Lousy Anna.

Chorus:
Ole debble Lousy Anna,
Dat scarecrow fer po' nigger.
Where de sugar cane grow to pine trees,
An' de pine tree turn to sugar.[43]

In the bondman's mind, Louisiana was nothing more than the "Old debble," and to find one's self living and working in sugar country exacted a heavy burden on the enslaved, both physically and psychologically. The price was not always so sweet.

Moreover, the demographics of antebellum Louisiana sugar plantations make them model sites to interrogate the interplay of southern masculinities. Various scholars have long noted the widespread, skewed gender imbalance present on most Louisiana sugar plantations throughout the nineteenth century,

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43 Quoted in John Smith Kendall, "New Orleans' 'Peculiar Institution,'" *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 23 (July 1940): 875

but few, if any, have ventured to thoroughly examine how this reality affected men's lives.[44] In *Sugar Masters*, Richard Follett maintains that achieving a male-favored sex ratio was quite deliberate and constituted nothing more than an "intrusive policy of demographic engineering" enacted by most sugar planters. In describing how one sugar planter's "preference for male labor paralleled a broader demographic pattern in the Louisiana and Cuban sugar country, where young men constituted approximately 60 percent of all sugar workers," Follett also makes clear that there was nothing *natural* about the male majority present in Louisiana's sugar parishes.[45] Similarly, Ann Patton Malone's *Sweet Chariot*, for example, chronicles Walter Brashear's numerous Louisiana sugar holdings from 1816 to 1860. Brashear was a Kentucky doctor who established at least four sugar plantations near the Atchafalaya Bay between 1816 and the 1830s. Malone concludes that on Brashear's Tiger Island sugar estate, "males made up a disproportionately large

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44 These texts discuss demographic trends on Louisiana sugar plantations and in other sugar producing regions. Nevertheless, explorations of masculine gender relations are absent. See V. Alton. Moody, *Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations* ((S. l.,), 1924); Charles Pierce Roland, *Louisiana Sugar Plantations During the American Civil War.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1957); J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country : The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950.* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves : The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); J. Carlyle Sitterson, "Hired Labor on Sugar Plantations of the Ante-Bellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* 14, no. 2 (May 1, 1948): 192–205; Michael Tadman, "The Demographic Cost of Sugar: Debates on Slave Societies and Natural Increase in the Americas," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 1, 2000): 1534–1575; Joe Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana.* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

45 Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters : Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 49.

part of the community—63 percent, compared to 37 percent females." Most importantly, enslaved "men of prime working age, seventeen to forty, made up about one-third of Tiger Island's slaves, and women in the same age bracket encompassed only 12 percent of the plantation's workers."[46] After examining demographic data for the Brashear plantations and other sugar estates throughout southeastern Louisiana over several decades, Malone also observes that stark gender imbalances on sugar plantations "almost always correlated with a high incidence of solitaires, most of them young." Hence, not only were sugar plantations male dominated spaces, they also housed high percentages of single men who rarely married or entered into relationships with the few available women on those plantations.[47] That most of these men's interactions were primarily with one another points to a much-needed cross-racial and multi-classed masculine gendered analysis, which is rarely done in southern history. After all, examining how men defined and set the terms of masculine behaviors among themselves is crucial to understanding how that masculine power was then disseminated throughout larger southern society.

As slavery scholar U. B. Phillips observed, "All the characteristic work in the sugar plantation called mainly for able-bodied laborers. Children were less used

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[46] Ann Patton. Malone, *Sweet Chariot : Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 150.

[47] Ibid., 156–162.

than in tobacco and cotton production, and the men and women, like the mules, tended to be of sturdier physique."[48] Generally, sugar planters viewed black men as prized laborers—an expensive commodity used to yield another precious one. Cane growers "understood the barbarous nature of the sugar work and the almost constant need for fresh [male] bodies," so in sugar country, black men's bodies sold at a premium.[49] Strong, virile enslaved men, therefore, came to dominate the sugar labor force in Louisiana, as their "muscle and sinew defined the contours of the black male—and indeed, black masculinity…" in the region.[50]

To stock their sugar plantations with the adequate slave manpower, Louisiana planters typically participated in the buying and selling of human flesh in the state's capital city. New Orleans was a well-known commercial hub in the South and was easily accessible via local waterways. Its proximity to many sugar plantations along the Red River facilitated the emergence of a robust slave trading

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[48] Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery : A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1918), 245.

[49] For information on the New Orleans slave market, see Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (New York: Ungar, 1959); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul : Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Richard. Sutch and Berkeley. Institute of Business and Economic Research. University of California, *The Breeding of Slaves for Sale and the Westward Expansion of Slavery, 1850-1860*. (Berkeley: Institute of Business and Economic Research, University of California], 1972); Calomiris C.W. and Pritchett J.B., "Preserving Slave Families for Profit: Traders' Incentives and Pricing in the New Orleans Slave Market," *J. Econ. Hist. Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 4 (2009): 986–1011; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves : Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Shawn Cole, "Capitalism and Freedom: Manumissions and the Slave Market in Louisiana, 1725-1820," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 1008–1027.

[50] Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters : Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 50–51, 55.

market for the state's sugar and cotton regions. There, the Pughs, Barrows, Beringers and other prominent sugar planters or their agents positioned themselves as shrewd businessmen. At the market, they did their bidding for mostly black male workers, and in so doing, "projected their visions of their own mastery over those who trudged before them."[51] Of all enslaved persons sold in the New Orleans slave market, men "represented as much as 85 percent of all slaves sold to sugar planters," who, according to Richard Follett, "were masters of physiognomy."[52] Through their transactions, Louisiana sugar masters demonstrated that they were expertly skilled at reading black men's bodies at the market. This 'skill' allowed planters to visually appraise the available slave pool in accordance with their own labor needs and their financial means. Nonetheless, the New Orleans slave market was not only a place where slavery and capitalism crossed paths; it was also where racial and gender ideologies veered their ugly heads, and mainly for the planter's material and psychological benefit.

Bearing in mind its multivalent meaning, historian Walter Johnson argues convincingly that the slave market, like churches, courtrooms, and agricultural journals, was one of "many such sites in the antebellum South" that constituted the "region's white (male) public sphere." In these male-dominated public arenas, racial and gender discourses were (re)presented, refined, and widely disseminated.

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[51] Ibid., 55.

[52] Ibid., 50.

For the worlds of slave buying and speculation, it seemed, also gave white men a forum in which they learned to read bodies and imbue them with various racial and gendered meanings. Johnson notes that many of Louisiana's sugar planters regularly participated in this "masculine social world in which being a 'good judge of slaves' was a noteworthy public identity, a world of manly one-upsmanship in which knowledge of slaves' bodies was bandied back and forth as white men cemented social ties and articulated a hierarchy among themselves through shared participation in the inspection and evaluation of black slaves."[53] These public spectacles, or to borrow from Saidiya Hartman, these "scenes of subjection," however, exposed not only black men's bodies to degrading public inspection, black women also battled their share of racist and misogynist open market readings.

After being snatched from freedom in the North kidnapped and sent to Louisiana by greedy slave traders, bondman Solomon Northup recalled his own harrowing auction experience in New Orleans. He remembered the great deal of care and showmanship Mr. Freeman put into preparing his property for market. Northup maintained that Mr. Freeman required his slaves to "appear smart and lively" and even practiced with them "the art of 'looking smart,' and of moving to

53 Johnson, *Soul by Soul : Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, 137.

our places with exact precision."[54] And though men and boys were often goaded to demonstrate their superior intellects and strength by running, jumping and performing many physical tasks, bondwomen like Emily, the child of Northup's friend at the same market, were purchased with sometimes more sinister intentions in mind. While men were sought primarily for the working capacity in sugar country, women were prized for their labor, reproductive potential, and possibly to fulfill her owner's sexual desires. In the case of Emily, her physical beauty and fair complexion made her an ideal candidate for the fancy trade, a perverse form of "commodity fetishism," according to Edward Baptist, that often resulted in the exploitation and rape of many bondwomen.[55] Together, Northup's and Emily's rather typical market experiences highlight the male-dominated business of appraising and buying slaves for Louisiana's sugar industry, and both episodes underscore how gender ideologies also affected that all too common practice.

Tragically, black masculinity in the South, and especially in sugar country, was read through dishonoring the black body and by white men determining its productive *and* reproductive capabilities in a public setting. This practice stood in

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54 Solomon Northup, Sue L. Eakin, and Joseph Logsdon, *Twelve Years a Slave.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 51.

55 Ibid., 57-60; For a closer discussion of the 'fancy trade,' see Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (2001): 1619–1650.

full contradistinction to essentially everything that defined white masculinities in the South. To be a white man in the region certainly relied, if at all, on far more than the public presentation of one's body. For public shaming and the preservation of one's reputation were deeply engrained in southern mores. Thus, maintaining a dignified and *honorable* public persona were key ingredients to the constitution of white manhood in the South, as too was the performance of mastery over others. That black and white men often faced these two very different set of societal expectations when defining and expressing the their masculinities at the New Orleans slave market only foretold how the terms of manhood and masculinity would be later contested and negotiated within the confines of the Louisiana sugar plantation.

Manifold Masculinities

Once bondmen made their way from the slave market to the sugar plantation, their lives as unfree men unfolded in fascinating ways. In cane country, achieving manhood was more than the consequence of one's birth as a biological male. In fact, masculinity in the sugar parishes, and everywhere else for that matter, was a socially and historically created identity. Those born male all over the South had to learn quickly how to navigate the particulars of southern manliness. If the ultimate goal was reaching that rite of passage known as manhood and enjoying its full benefits, then a southern man needed to understand communal norms and expectations, and perform accordingly. And for the men living and working on Louisiana sugar plantations, the usual specters of race and class contributed greatly to how they accessed and internalized their masculine identities and undoubtedly, influenced how they projected their masculinity to various publics—from romantic partners, colleagues, authority figures and so forth. Therefore, within the confines of the male-dominated space of the sugar plantation, labor assignments, family life, leisure time and an inescapable abundance of homosocial bonding made the performance of southern masculinities as dynamic *and* valuable as sugar itself. Moreover, not only did Louisiana sugar plantations yield saccharine gold, they also produced a diversity of masculine types—sometimes in direct antagonism or synchronization with each

other. All of these masculinities, however, remained in constant conversation with the region's dominant masculine paradigm, and each ultimately helped shape the overall character of southern manhood.

In the high-stakes, arduous world of sugar cultivation, the planter wielded the most power on these estates by virtue of his race and class position. Indeed, his race and class privilege afforded him access to all of the trappings of southern manhood—land and slave ownership, citizenship, marriage and hopefully, public respect. In fact, he represented the manly ideal in the region and on the sugar plantation. Poor white and freed black men hoped to emulate him and enslaved me could only dream of such a life.

Most Louisiana sugar planters wore many hats in their homes and communities, but many were first modern businessmen in an industry that "required a tough, driving temperament and a rational eye for profit and innovation."[56] The various parish newspapers and agricultural journals such as the *Southern Cultivator* and *De Bow's* chronicled their lives as planters and men of note in Louisiana society. When they danced in extravagant balls either at home or in nearby New Orleans, participated in horseracing, played highbrow sports or hunted in swamplands, the planters' class and even manhood status was internally

[56] Follett, *The Sugar Masters : Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860*, 15.

and publically reinforced. For most of these activities were of and for the planter's exclusive participation; others had to maintain their social distance.[57]

However, over time and due to consolidation and war, the number of sugar estates in southern Louisiana decreased. William F. Weeks, a sugar planter with a two thousand acre estate on Grand Cote Island and over two hundred slaves, along with about five hundred other elite sugar planters, or those owning fifty or more slaves, "controlled over two-thirds of the slaves and available acreage in Louisiana's cane world" by 1860. And though they accounted for only 13 percent of the slaveholders in cane country, they produced about three-quarters of the region's sugar.[58] As sugar prices increased, Louisiana's sugar planters gained in wealth, social capital, and political power. Their growing sugar fortunes and the manly dictates of the region kept men like Samuel R. Walker, owner of Elia Plantation near New Orleans, wedded to the gendered and racial idea of paternalism as a way of maintaining social hierarchies and allaying fears of slave unrest in the region.

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[57] For a review of Louisiana sugar planter culture, see Craig A. Bauer, *Creole Genesis : The Bringier Family and Antebellum Plantation Life in Louisiana* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2011); Thomas Becnel, *The Barrow Family and the Barataria and Lafourche Canal : The Transportation Revolution in Louisiana, 1829-1925* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); W. E. Butler, *Down Among the Sugar Cane :The Story of Louisiana Sugar Plantations and Their Railroads* (Baton Rouge, La.: Moran Pub. Corp., 1980); William Barrow Floyd, *The Barrow Family of Old Louisiana*. (Lexington, Ky., 1963); Anya Jabour, "Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South: William Wirt and His Friends," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20, no. 1 (April 1, 2000): 83–111; Sarah Russell, "Intermarriage and Intermingling: Constructing the Planter Class in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1803-1850," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 46, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 407–434; William Kauffman. Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House : Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-nineteenth-century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

[58] Follett, *The Sugar Masters : Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860*, 33.

Walker argued boastfully in his diary that slavery was nothing more than a "good and wise despotism." And from his vantage point, he averred, "Slavery is from its very nature eminently patriarchal and altogether agricultural." Walker even asked rhetorically, "What can be more honorable employment for a Southern gentleman than [an] occupation as this?"[59] In many ways, Walker represented the typical Louisiana sugar planter in that he derived his manly identity from his domination or mastery over others. He lorded over his household, his slaves, and even the unpredictable Louisiana climate from the confines of the Elia Plantation. In so doing, he demonstrated the basic tenets of southern, hegemonic masculinity. He was honorable. He was proud. He was the authoritative man on that sugar estate and he made no apologies for it.

On Walker's estate and the hundreds of others in cane country, January marked the start of sugar planting season. On many sugar plantations in the state, it was custom for slaveholders to give elaborate Christmas suppers to mark the beginning of a grueling process. Solomon Northup, one of the most famous former bondmen to record his memories of cane country, described these festive occasions as part of the "carnival season for the children of bondage." A different planter in the region, he recalled, would take turns hosting the event, always "inviting the slaves from neighboring plantations to join his own on this occasion."

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[59] Samuel R. Walker quoted in John B. Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord : Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 108.

The ebullient celebrations were typically large in scale, oftentimes exceeding "…from three to five hundred…coming together on foot, in carts, on horseback, on mules, riding double and triple, sometimes a boy, a girl and an old woman." It was during this short-lived tradition that many sugar planters publicly flaunted their great wealth, their status as masters, and expressed their gratitude for the slaves' "constant labor," which made both their affluence and mastery possible. Sugar planters allowed their slaves ample "feasting, frolicking, and fiddling" for a couple of days as remuneration of some kind. For these were indeed jubilant times for Louisiana's black cane workers. And although most bondmen took delight in their "restricted liberty" and this rare moment to potentially court women from abroad plantations, some simply used the time to their own advantage. [60] Solomon Northup recounted a poignant anecdote that underscored how many enslaved men and women viewed the Christmas party as one large courtship ritual. The festivities were welcomed by many bondmen since they greatly outnumbered women on a majority of Louisiana sugar estates. The obvious flirtation between a bondman named Sam and Miss Lively thrust Sam into an energy-zapping dancing competition with several present male slaves, all vying for Miss Lively's attention and affection. Historian Deborah Gray White vividly describes the occasion as such:

[60] Northup, Eakin, and Logsdon, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 163.

> At a Christmas party Sam attempted to impress Lively with his dancing talents, and she cooperated by giving him the honor of her first dance. While his rivals sat crestfallen Sam rose to demonstrate that he was worthy of her attention. His movements tested the strength of every muscle and ligament in his body, as his "legs flew like drumsticks down the outside and up the middle, by the side of his bewitching partner." While exhaustion proved the better of most couples, pride and passion drove Sam to superhuman exertions, which finally got the better of his agile body. One by one his rivals took their position by the side of Lively, who herself proved tireless. One by one they failed to make an impression on or to out-dance the coquette. In the end, all of Miss Lively's suitors had been turned away and she was left alone on the dance floor. She had proved that her reputation, as well as her name, was well deserved.[61]

Ultimately, the exchange between Sam and Miss Lively highlights how eager many black men on these largely male-populated sugar plantations sought the company and attention of the opposite sex. Certainly, the presence of a dynamic and assertive woman gave many bondmen an opportunity to publicly project and display their masculinity. Through friendly male competition with one another for title of best dancer, Sam and his friends, demonstrated, therefore, that bondmen often judged and measured their manliness against others' on the plantation, and particularly when women penetrated that testosterone-filled environment. Sam's dance performance, however, was more for his male peers' consumption as it was for Miss Lively's approbation. Furthermore, the idea of a woman having more endurance to dance for hours gave Sam and the other suitors the motivation to prove that their masculinity could nevertheless trump, tame, or harness Miss

[61] Solomon Northup quoted in Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985), 144–145.

Lively's feminine powers. In the men's minds, a man, and presumably a prime-hand should ultimately possess adequate stamina and brawn to show this dancing lady who was indeed *master* of this art form. Thus, bondmen sometimes pursued a different sort of mastery than white slaveholders in cane country. For those men who quickly bowed out, however, one could only imagine how this very public performance adversely affected perceptions of their masculinity within the slave community. In the eyes of some of their peers, and particularly some of the assembled women, Miss Lively's victims not only walked away exhausted but possibly in need of a masculine image repair. For the defeated dancers, then, their claims to masculinity possibly hung in the balance around the sugar plantation until the next opportunity to reclaim it was made available. Still no matter how they chose to celebrate, the culmination of a backbreaking harvest season was always welcomed with delight. After all, the annual Christmas supper was just one fleeting moment at the end of a notoriously laborious year.

In some quarters, however, the jovial holiday spirit did not last long. While most slaves throughout sugar country allowed the trappings of Christmas supper to occupy their thoughts and dictate the tone and tenor of their new routines for a few days, there were some enslaved men unwilling to endure yet another holiday in bondage. In the days leading up to January 8, 1811, a few bondmen from the Andry and surrounding sugar plantations were ready to strike at the yoke of Louisiana slavery. Charles Deslondes, a mulatto slave driver brought to Louisiana

following the Haitian Revolution, organized and led a violent uprising of bondmen and maroons along the German Coast of the Mississippi River. Known sometimes as the 1811 Slave Uprising, the male-led insurrection fully indicated that all was not well in sugar country. For this group of subversive bondmen was angry and displeased with their lot as exploited laborers and dishonored men in Louisiana's cash rich sugar parishes. Year after year, they watched the sugar masters indulge in their riches, made possible by black bodies, and freely enjoy the prerogatives of southern white manhood while denying enslaved men similar rights. But for Deslondes in particular, he could no longer tolerate attacks on his manhood. So according to historian Daniel Rasmussen, Deslondes' relied upon his privileges as a half-white slave with "relative freedom" to plot a slave insurrection that would "kill off the white planters, seize power for the black slaves, and win his freedom and that of all those laboring in chains on the German Coast."[62] Using both his position and his relationship with a woman on the nearby Trépagnier estate as the "perfect cover," Charles Deslondes possessed the rare geographical literacy and ease of mobility that most sugar slaves could only envy. While presumably "spending nights and weekends in a small cabin" with this woman, it is believed that Deslondes also visited several native African and Haitian co-conspirators along his frequent journeys to the Trépagnier plantation. Yet, the lack of extant

[62] Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising : the Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York, NY: Harper, 2011), 85.

source materials surrounding the 1811 rebellion makes pinpointing the precise nature of these alleged covert meetings and the ultimate cause of the uprising extremely difficult.[63]

Though oftentimes viewed simply as a slave revolt in which bound labor lashed out at management, the 1811 Slave Uprising also arguably represented something far more complicated. One white observer called the rebellion "a miniature representation of the horrors of St. Domingo."[64] And for those involved—the 500 men who brandished firearms and wielded razor-edged machetes —striking against members of the planter class en route to New Orleans and exacting violent revenge on their sugar crops and grandiose plantation mansions was certainly a smaller re-enactment of St. Domingue. But at the same time, what transpired in cane country was also a matter of black men proving, asserting, and/or reclaiming their manhood and to some degree, doing all that they could to defend the honor of the few bondwomen in the sugar parishes.[65] For

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[63] Ibid., 81–85.

[64] Letter from "A Gentleman at New-Orleans" to "A Member of Congress," January 11, 1811, reprinted in the New York Evening Post, February 19, 1811; quote also found in James H. Dormon, "The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 18, no. 4 (1977): 393.

[65] Though many of the details surrounding the German Coast Massacre remain illusive, Daniel Rasmussen has provided the most recent interpretation of the event. Though not a professionally trained historian, his work currently stands as the best treatment of the incident. Still, some Louisiana historians have their reservations about some of his claims and lack of source materials. See Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising : The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York, NY: Harper, 2011); and for criticism of Rasmussen's work, see Jonathan Yardley, "Daniel Rasmussen's "American Uprising": A Flawed Account of 1811 Slave Rebellion" *Washington Post,* Jan. 28, 2011 <

Deslondes, particularly, we can speculate that maybe his "mother whispered to him the story of her own rape, or inculcated in him a sense of rage and resentment toward the planter class. Perhaps the sons or brothers of the Trépagnier family had Charles's woman for sport."[66] Whatever his ultimate motivation for organizing and executing the uprising, Deslondes felt he had something to prove or reclaim. Chattel slavery, and not just in Louisiana's bustling sugar parishes, robbed men like Deslondes of the basic recognition of their masculine identity in many respects. Though they provided the muscle, endurance, and skill that annually yielded successful sugar crops across southeastern Louisiana, they did not enjoy public acknowledgement of their honor or even of their mastery over the land or over their households or even over themselves, if they in fact chose to act in such a manner. For Deslondes and the hundreds of bondmen involved in the Uprising paid severely for attempting to assert and defend their honor as men. Though sociologist Orlando Patterson has famously described a slave as a "person without honor,"[67] and one who is therefore unable to claim manhood rights, men like Deslondes and his followers demonstrated that manly honor mattered among some bondmen just as it did for white men in the Old South. In fact, "The

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http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2011/01/28/AR2011012803483.html> (accessed 3/12/2012).

[66] Ibid., 85.

[67] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 12.

degradation slaves suffered in white society only served to enhance their sense of honor among themselves,"[68] and contrary to Bertram Wyatt-Brown's claim that, "[S]lave honor was confined to the slave quarters,"[69] the 1811 Louisiana Slave Uprising aptly proves that honor and manhood were contested and negotiated on various terrains—from the slave quarters, the fields, and even along the roads and waterways throughout sugar country. Thus, "whereas Southern white conceptions of masculinity have typically involved resisting interference from outside the region, black men in the [antebellum] South have frequently constructed notions of masculinity" within the contexts of bondage and all of its associated economic and social depredations. Bondage, then, may have challenged a slave's manhood in cane country, but it also provided many distinct opportunities for enslaved men to challenge, transform, or co-opt the dominant masculine ideals in the South, within and without of the slave quarters.

Moreover, for many bondmen in the sugar parishes, the use of violence and other forms of active resistance was yet another way in which they could demonstrate the reach and contours of their masculinity to each other and the white planters and plantation workers who lorded over them. In this respect, both

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[68] Jeff Forret, "He Was No Man Attall"?: Slave Men, Honor, Violence and Masculinity in the Antebellum South, in Timothy R. Buckner and Peter Caster, *Fathers, Preachers, Rebels, Men : Black Masculinity in U.S. History and Literature, 1820-1945* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 24.

[69] Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," 1249.

black and white southern manhood shared much in common. Both groups of men oftentimes resorted to violence as a marker of true masculine identity, for violence allowed a man to establish his power over a particular individual or situation. In *Honor and Violence in the Old South,* Bertram Wyatt-Brown asserts that violence coexisted alongside honor in the Old South, though the "ethic of honor was designed to prevent unjustified violence, unpredictability, and anarchy."[70] Nevertheless, planters, slaves, and certainly yeomen were not above resorting to violent means to settle petty disputes, punish insubordination and enforce discipline, and of course, to defend one's reputation. Solomon Northup took notice of the surprisingly violent southern culture when he exclaimed, "Every man carries his bowie knife, and when two fall out, they set to work hacking and thrusting at each other, more like savages than civilized and enlightened beings."[71] As a northerner by birth, Northup had to quickly learn to recognize and live within the parameters of southern masculinities. He also had to be sure to never forget his position as a black bondmen on the very bottom of the region's rigid social and gender hierarchy. Yet as Northup suggests, southern men of all stripes arguably viewed violence as a constituent element of masculinity, for it was merely a part of the publically prescribed "script" that laid out the criteria of southern manliness.

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[70] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4, 39.

[71] Northup, Eakin, and Logsdon, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 157.

In fact, tales of bloody, brutal exchanges are quite abundant in the extant plantation, legal, and newspaper sources throughout Louisiana's sugar country. It is beyond the scope of this paper, however, to chronicle every discovered example of violence among men on sugar plantations. Nonetheless, what most of these incidents have in common is the singular human desire to wield power over someone else—from fellow bondmen, children, planters to overseers. Whether an overseer savagely beating an intractable field hand or a planter dueling with another planter, these episodes of male aggression merely suggest that men relentlessly jockeyed for improved social status, public respect, and indeed, masculine recognition throughout cane country at nearly every turn.

For a well-detailed example of one such act of aggression that pitted an audacious slave against a driver or overseer, or in some instances, the planter himself, Solomon Northup's slave narrative provides ample fodder. Northup recalled the numerous physical confrontations he had with various plantation managers, including a few with his owners. Master Edwin Epps, a man Northup describes as "constitutionally subject to periods of ill-humor" and a notorious drunk, rarely spared the rod when it came to insubordinate or seemingly indolent bondmen.[72] Whether bondmen acted out of turn or if Epps perceived them as ungovernable, he would unpredictably lash out in a violent rage, sometimes not

[72] Ibid., 192.

caring if he mortally wounded his own human property, as was the case with the bondwoman Patsey. Epps beat her so badly for not heeding his sexual advances that the woman ultimately died of sorrow and restlessness. Her scarred back kept her awake for days until she lost all desire to live. After witnessing this act, Northup realized the limits of his manhood. He could neither save Patsey nor seek revenge upon Mr. Epps. As a bondman, Northup understood the limits of his masculine power. There were simply some battles lost before they began. This was one such battle.

On many sugar plantations, some bondmen enjoyed significant responsibilities and oftentimes parlayed their skill and relationship with the planter or overseer into willful assertions of their manhood. Planters relied on these exceptionally talented workers, and almost to a fault. Strong, fast field hands were assets during the short planting and harvesting seasons, but extremely knowledgeable engineers, drivers, and craftsmen were just as valued. Their expertise made them models of envy on the plantations, and for some bondmen, these highly skilled laborers represented the paragons of black masculinity. For one, they often had greater access to the planter, so unlike the large population of field hands on sugar plantations, these workers usually did not experience the same degree of social distance from their so-called social betters. Oftentimes, planters and their 'privileged bondsmen,' to borrow Robert Starobin's characterization of this lot, interacted more as friends than as master and slave.

There was certainly trust, and undoubtedly, respect between them. Yet, the planter typically had to remind his worker who was really boss. The historical record is replete with stories about these sugar drivers, craftsmen, and machine workers. Though one story in particular successfully encapsulates how some black men leveraged their skill and position on the sugar plantation to resist their perpetual domination and gesture toward a new social arrangement via acts of resistance.

On the Bowden Plantation in Ascension Parish, a well-respected, skilled slave named Old Pleasant had had enough. The work pace on the sugar plantation was unrelenting and Old Pleasant did not feel honored by his master, Mr. Trist. Since it appeared that Trist cared more about profit than his labor force, the elderly bondman decided to act decisively and express his disapproval. In recounting Old Pleasant's "villainy" a week later, Mr. Trist wrote to another prominent sugar master in the area Mr. Bringier and recalled:

> He suffered the water in the boilers to get so low that there was scarcely any left in them, and when informed by some of the hands that there was something wrong, told them to mind their own business. The engineer…made his appearance about this time, and on going to the boilers found them heated almost to redness—He gave the alarm and bid all in the neighborhood run for their lives—but Pleasant instead of showing any concern…went and seated himself very cooly on one of the boilers…shortly after I [Trist] arrived another alarm was given; steam escaped with violence from the top of one of the boilers and made the ashes and brick fly…This leak being stopped, steam was again raised when to our dismay it rushed out from other places and on cooling down and examining, we found several rents in the first boilers—it took five days to repair

> damages…but the syrup in the tanks and filters got sour and we made sugar of inferior quality for several days.[73]

In Pleasant's eyes, if Mr. Trist could not honor his workers and treat them in a more humanely fashion then there was no better way to get through to him than through his pocket. Halting production certainly affected Mr. Trist's bottom-line that season, while possibly elevating Old Pleasant's social capital on the plantation and his own sense of manliness. Though he could not stand up to Trist directly, he indirectly engaged his master by challenging both his business savvy and manhood. After all, a man in Mr. Trist's position should have known how to better finesse such a situation.

Historian Ed Baptist has suggested that we look beyond old, stale frameworks to discuss manhood and masculinity in the antebellum South. He expressly challenged the assumption that black men were not manly or masculine if they did not openly resist bondage. Surprisingly, this was the view held by many blacks and whites in the North. Yet, Baptist's 'absent subject' demonstrated quite successfully that manhood could and should be achieved and recognized in its quiet moments just as it often is when it is loud, bellicose, and unavoidably public. The underlying message then is that there existed a range of black and white masculinities in the Old South. In places like the Florida frontier or on many Louisiana sugar plantations, men struggled to assert themselves as men. Whether

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73 This story of Old Pleasant comes from letters between H.B. Trist and Bringier on November 25, 1854, Trist Wood Papers, UNC, and is quoted in Follett, *Sugar Masters*, 146.

they embraced notions of honor and mastery to fit within their particular life circumstances as Charles Deslondes did or, whether they discounted altogether hegemonic notions of manhood or borrowed elements from the dominant strand, they still discovered and wrestled with their relationship to the larger idea of southern manhood. The sugar plantation, teeming with men of various races and classes, provided an interesting space for the performance of sundry masculinities. In that space, the drama and constant performing forced men to become the type of men they found most appealing and useful. They were by no means bound by a fixed, rigid notion of masculinity. They could choose to emulate other men or fashion their own brand of manliness, even though they were under constant surveillance by other men who either approved or disapproved of those choices. Ultimately, just as the sugar planter was able to extract both molasses and granulated sugar from a hard season of raising cane, those male sugar workers could also extract whatever kind of masculine performance they wanted so long as it was useful and profitable in some way.

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Vita

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